

# A Russian Experience

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The Russian border guards ordered us to disembark the bus so they could search our persons and our luggage prior to entering into Estonia. The American Embassy warned our small Air War College contingent that it could take several hours to cross the border. Now we were here. Would they seize “unauthorized” items in our bags? Would they send us back to St. Petersburg? The prospects for quick crossing did not look good as they asked us to unload all of our luggage.

The USSR I remember was a formidable foe that commanded the respect of our military and our nation for more than 50 years. One of my fellow classmates on the trip, a colonel and former missileer, recognized many places in Moscow – through the crosshairs, (as he had never been to Russia). That respect shaped and sharpened our defenses as well as theirs. It kept everyone’s skills razor sharp, from submariners, to pilots, to maintainers, and it spurred on great advances in technology. Yes, at one time we took the USSR extremely seriously.

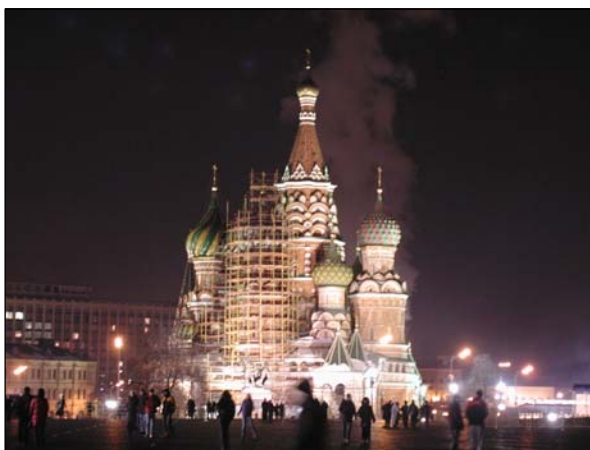
About the border guards. In the end, the guards were so overwhelmed by the amount of luggage we had, they asked us to put all our bags *back* in the bus, except for one piece. They ordered us to carry our one bag through the metal detector, (which was not plugged in because the border station probably didn’t have the money to pay for the electricity) and to show our passports. We crossed the border without incident, experiencing first-hand, yet another example of a broken country that’s a shadow of its former self.

History is replete with examples of great

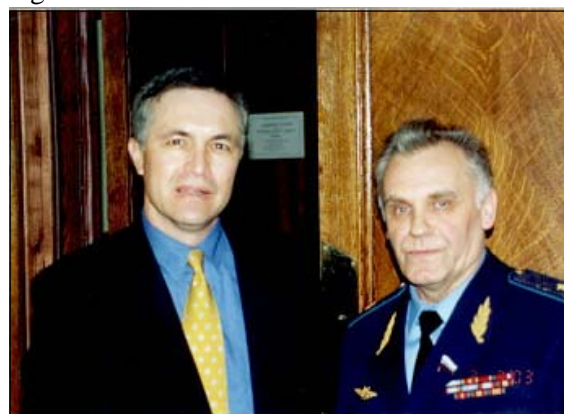
empires and civilizations that rise and inevitably fall. In a mere 200 years the United States has risen to status of superpower and stood unwaveringly, eyeball-to-eyeball with the Soviet Union. Not only did they blink, they outright fainted. Today we stand alone as the mightiest force the world has ever known. What happened? Democracy happened. While not perfect, democracy continues to prove itself as the most sustainable system not only for governing ourselves, but for cultivating the

human spirit towards noble ideals.

But what does this have to do with the average Guardsman reporting for duty in Kirtland, Fort Hood, or Bosrah? Everything. It’s the Guardsman, who is not only relevant, but essential. We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Active Duty when it’s dangerous, hard, hot, and far from home, to defend democracy and defend those who cannot defend themselves. All decisions to engage in military action are complicated and fraught with dilemmas, but once the call is made, the Guard is ready. I, for one, am proud to be a Guardsman and an American, protestors notwithstanding.



**St. Basil's Cathedral at the Southern end of Red Square.**



**Torres with Russian Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff at the Duma**



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